

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection

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Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk and Thomas J. Schoenbaum

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RICHARD RUSK: Pop, we spent quite a bit of time talking about the Tet offensive and the policy review after the Tet offensive. What were your hopes for an American policy after that Presidential speech of March 31st with respect to Vietnam? Obviously there had been some rather major changes. What were your hopes and expectations for our role over there for the rest of that year?

DEAN RUSK: I felt that we ought to explore every possibility for bringing the war to a conclusion by some kind of negotiated agreement or by a simple de facto decision by the authorities in Hanoi to pull back from their military effort in South Vietnam. It seemed clear to me at that time that people at the grassroots in this country had pretty much come to the conclusion that if we couldn't tell them when the war was going to be over, we ought to chuck it. I think I overestimated the possibilities of getting Hanoi into a serious and genuine negotiation because they were getting a lot of signals out of this country which, in effect, said to them just to hang in there and they would win politically what they could not win militarily. Normally you would have expected that the serious military setback that they received during the Tet offensive would have led them to decide to call it off for a while, stand back and lick their wounds, and wait for another occasion someday. That's the sort of thing that happened in Korea. That's the sort of thing that happened with the Berlin Blockade and certain other situations. But that did not happen. In any event, from the Tet offensive on to the first six months of 1968 we were looking for some sort of method by which we could get the North Vietnamese to a conference table somewhere: we could use intermediaries and find a political end to that situation. That turned out to be rather complicated, just in the selection of the place to meet. It turned out to be a little troublesome. They nominated some capitols that were unacceptable to us. When we went back--

RICHARD RUSK: Let's see. They nominated Rangoon as one site.

DEAN RUSK: Warsaw.

RICHARD RUSK: And then finally Paris.

DEAN RUSK: Well, not at the beginning because when we put back our names of places in which to meet, such as Geneva, Vienna, places like that, I deliberately saw to it that our list did not include Paris. Because if we had had Paris on our list, they would have turned it down. In any event, Lyndon Johnson was not very enthusiastic about Paris because he didn't like the attitude that Charles de Gaulle had taken toward Vietnam during all this experience.

SCHOENBAUM: Who suggested Paris to begin with? Did you have a feeling that Paris would be the site?

DEAN RUSK: I deliberately kept Paris off of our list in order to leave it open to meet in Paris. And I think they were the ones who finally came back with the suggestion of Paris. And despite his reluctance, Lyndon Johnson finally agreed to Paris as a setting for it. But anyhow--

SCHOENBAUM: Did he think that the French would interfere if it was in Paris?

DEAN RUSK: Well, he thought that the mood and atmosphere in Paris would be negative from our point of view.

RICHARD RUSK: Like a milder Panmunjom.

DEAN RUSK: That's right.

SCHOENBAUM: Johnson, especially at that time, did not get along at all with Charles de Gaulle?

DEAN RUSK: Not on Vietnam. Nor had Kennedy on Vietnam. You see, despite the fact that France was a signatory to the Southeast Asia Treaty; Charles de Gaulle told Kennedy in 1961 that there would never be another French soldier in southeast Asia. And for all practical purposes, that meant that France had seceded from the Southeast Asia Treaty. And in meetings of the SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] foreign ministers, [Maurice] Couve de Murville, de Gaulle's Foreign Minister, proved to be somewhat troublesome about any communique that we tried to issue from those foreign minister meetings. And there came a point where I think Couve de Murville quit coming to the Southeast Asia Foreign Ministers' meetings. But anyhow, on Southeast Asia, Charles de Gaulle frequently called that struggle the "dirty war," and was publicly very negative about it. I don't know how in his own mind he reconciled his attitude toward the treaty obligations of France under the Southeast Asia Treaty. But if he had any problems of that sort he brushed them aside. Anyhow, despite Lyndon Johnson's reluctance to have these talks occur in Paris, it was agreed that in Paris they would occur. And then there was a problem about who would actually be present for the negotiations, and whether or not the Vietcong would have any representation there, such things as the shape of the table, questions of that sort.

SCHOENBAUM: Was the shape of the table really an issue, or was that just built up by the press?

DEAN RUSK: Well, it was an issue in the sense that that kind of an issue becomes symbolic of the relative bargaining position of the two sides. And it sounds silly to argue over the shape of the table, but there was more involved than that. But we finally worked that out. But then there was a serious question as to whether the South Vietnamese, [Nguyen Van] Thieu and his colleagues would participate. And that problem went on into the fall of 1968.

SCHOENBAUM: Why didn't they want to participate?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think that they were, of course, nervous about what the results of any such negotiation would be, as well they might be. And I also think that they were encouraged to

believe that they would get a better deal from [Richard Milhous] Nixon than they would get from Lyndon Johnson, which, if you look at the whole history of the situation, was quite ironic because it was Nixon who presided over the withdrawal of American forces and the abandonment of South Vietnam.

RICHARD RUSK: Although it was also Nixon that continued a high level of support for South Vietnam for at least another four years. It was very likely that had Humphrey been elected that he would have been more willing to terminate the war, and cut our losses.

DEAN RUSK: As I indicated on an earlier tape--

RICHARD RUSK: In that sense the South Vietnamese may have--

DEAN RUSK: The Johnson administration turned over to Nixon a very strong military position in South Vietnam, but we did not turn over to him a unified Congress and a unified people. And I felt, myself, that we had to get out of Vietnam, almost come what may, because that decision had been made more or less at the grassroots.

RICHARD RUSK: Just a minute, Tom. When did you feel that, Pop? When did you really believe that we had to get out?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think late March, April, along in there when these reflections of public opinion of the grassroots began to come in and became quite decisive in terms of the attitude of people at the grassroots. And I was surprised when President Nixon stayed with it as long as he did. I can understand why he tried to leave behind something that was more or less satisfactory from an American point of view. But he continued the arms struggle under great difficulties.

SCHOENBAUM: At the time that did not come through that you--You, undoubtedly as a reflection also of LBJ, had determined to change course in Vietnam at that time in late March, but that didn't come through vividly to the people at least until--

DEAN RUSK: It wasn't shaped in the form of "Let's get out of Vietnam regardless of consequences." It was a reflection of an effort we had been making periodically over the years to find a negotiated solution to the problem.

SCHOENBAUM: But how exactly did your policy change? Before March you were trying to find a negotiated solution to the problem, in the sense that the North leave the South alone. How was your policy different from--

DEAN RUSK: Well, the policy didn't change, even though the perceptions in our minds might have been different. The policy continued to be that we would support Vietnam, but that we would try to find a negotiated solution. Well, that had been true all along. But we thought that maybe the impact of the Tet Offensive on the North Vietnamese, coupled with our own perceptions about the attitude of people at the grassroots, might open up possibilities that had not existed before. The trouble is that the North Vietnamese came to understand those problems we had at the grassroots, and this just caused them to persist and stay with their effort. And I think

they undoubtedly made the judgment that if they did persist, they would win politically what they could not win militarily.

SCHOENBAUM: How were you communicating with the North Vietnamese at that time prior to the meeting in Paris when the discussions about--

DEAN RUSK: Well, we were never really out of contact with the North Vietnamese in one way or another. There were other governments, like the Poles and the Rumanians and the Russians, and some others: the Canadians.

SCHOENBAUM: But it was not face to face or direct?

DEAN RUSK: I forget the details now, but there were occasions when in a capital where the North Vietnamese were represented we would occasionally drop off a message to them at the embassy. They would usually return it to us, allegedly unopened, but we knew darn well that they had read the message before they returned it to us. So we always had contacts with the North Vietnamese. As a matter of fact, there were all sorts of people who were visiting Hanoi in those days: some of the other governments as well as private citizens and groups. And one of our problems was that people would go to Hanoi, and would not understand what they were hearing from the authorities in Hanoi, and would come away eight months pregnant with peace. And then we would check this out again with Hanoi and find there was nothing to it in terms of any real desire for a peaceful settlement of the situation, because these people had simply not understood the subtleties of the words that they were hearing in Hanoi. But there almost- got to be a race for a Nobel Peace Prize going on there among all sorts of people--organizations, governments, people of that--various things--trying to find some way to bring this to a conclusion. U Thant, up at the United Nations, got into it at one point. And he held out to us that he had had some sort of a message from Hanoi pointing toward the possibility of a peaceful settlement. And we learned that there was nothing to this alleged message that he said he had from Hanoi. And so we were criticized when we did not publicly respond favorably to U Thant's suggestions to us.

SCHOENBAUM: Do you think U Thant was just misled or was he really in bad faith?

DEAN RUSK: It's hard to speak ill of the dead, but I think he knew better when he represented to us that he had had a message from Hanoi pointing toward peace.

SCHOENBAUM: Just to put the pressure on the United States?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. Sometimes intermediaries will do that. They'll say things to each side that go beyond their briefs from each side, hoping that somehow they would get the two sides together. But I didn't very much appreciate U Thant's role at that particular point.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, maybe we can get you to comment on the selection of the American delegation and the performance of the American delegation over at Paris. I believe [William] Averell Harriman was one of that group: more or less headed it up. And you had wanted

Lewellyn [E.] Thompson on that delegation, and I believed LBJ balked; he preferred Cyrus [Roberts] Vance. Is there anything of significance in that?

DEAN RUSK: No, we didn't have any real great difficulty over that. Averell Harriman was one of our most experienced negotiators. He had dealt with the Russians a great deal over the years. He was a disciplined negotiator in the sense that he did not go off into the wild, blue yonder. He operated within his instructions. And he had great public standing, not only nationally but internationally. And he seemed to be a suitable man to head the delegation. Now, I forget now whether I proposed Lewellyn Thompson, but Lewellyn Thompson was one of our great experts on the communist world. And he had negotiated with the communists. He had conducted those several hundred negotiations that led to the Austrian Peace Treaty, for example. But Cy Vance was an expert troubleshooter. We had used him in Cyprus, and we had used him in the Dominican Republic affair and other places. And I had no problem at all about having Cy Vance on the delegation. He was and is a very able man, and knows his way around negotiations. They more or less selected their own staff: Harriman and Vance.

SCHOENBAUM: Why didn't LBJ want Lewellyn Thompson?

RICHARD RUSK: This is something that I picked out of [Warren I.] Cohen's account [*Dean Rusk*, Cooper Square, 1980].

DEAN RUSK: I don't remember any dispute over that subject. If there was one at all it wouldn't have been very important, because the difference between Lewellyn Thompson and Cy Vance was negligible. So I don't think LBJ and I would have quarreled over that.

RICHARD RUSK: Did Harriman and the American delegation stay within their instructions throughout this period?

DEAN RUSK: Yes. They would, on occasion, come back to us and make some suggestions about how they might move on a particular point, or modify a particular point. And LBJ scrutinized those recommendations very carefully. We accepted some of them. I think we rejected certain others. But we did not want to simply go through the empty gestures that we had been through in the Laos Accords of 1962 where we got a good agreement on paper, but got no performance in fact. And we didn't want to repeat that experience. In retrospect maybe we should have, if we felt that we had to get out anyhow, take some kind of formula, more or less like the formula that Henry [Alfred] Kissinger used later on in which we got out of Vietnam: gave up the effort for an agreement that seemed clear was not going to be performed by the North Vietnamese.

RICHARD RUSK: I think some conflict did develop, certainly within the American delegation. I believe between perhaps you and Harriman and Vance over this question of Saigon's refusal to go along with the arrangements that were being negotiated. And I remember things seemed to be going smoothly at one point. And the President Thieu of South Vietnam just absolutely dug his heels in and threw a monkey wrench into the procedures.

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think Averell Harriman seemed to think that all we had to do was to order Thieu to do something and he would do it, that he had no choice since we were providing a lot of support for Thieu. But it just didn't work out that way. Thieu was not in a situation where he would simply snap his heels and salute every time we spoke. And we had to take into account the fact that we had to maneuver Thieu into taking part in those negotiations. We just couldn't order him to do so.

SCHOENBAUM: Who was in charge of maneuvering Thieu at this time? Alexis Johnson?

DEAN RUSK: Well, let's see. It was [Ellsworth] Bunker who was Ambassador in Saigon at that time, wasn't it? Well, he was the one who took much of the burden of that. But then as the campaign developed, there was some evidence that some of the Nixon people seemed to encourage Thieu to be stubborn, on the theory that he would have a better deal under Nixon than he would get under Johnson. And I suspect also, from the point of view of the Nixon campaign, that they were a little nervous about it becoming clear that we were well on the way to some kind of negotiated conclusion of the Vietnam affair.

SCHOENBAUM: Did they do that directly? Did they approach him, you think?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I never had any direct evidence that Nixon personally was directly involved in this process. But there was some reason to believe that Spiro Agnew and Madame [Anna Chan] Chennault were involved in contacts with President Thieu on that general subject. But I never got to the bottom of that.

SCHOENBAUM: Did the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] look into that? That's pretty serious.

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think we better just leave that where it stands. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: I don't recall seeing any of this in the records, Pop.

DEAN RUSK: Oh, there was some press speculation about this at the time.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, there's some press speculation that the Nixon campaign had indeed got hold of Thieu in some fashion and encouraged him to stand firm. But as far as who these people might have been and how they might have contacted Thieu, I don't--

DEAN RUSK: Well, let's just say that that information is not mine to divulge. Sorry, boys! (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: I suppose it would have been in the fall of '68, October--

DEAN RUSK: On one occasion, when some critical point in the negotiations came up, Lyndon Johnson got on a conference telephone call with the then-candidates, including Richard Nixon, Hubert Humphrey, and George [Corley] Wallace. And he talked to them wanting a unified position on a particular point that was being discussed. And he seemed to get it from each of the

candidates, because he didn't want to let these matters become a bitter partisan political issue here in the United States if he could avoid it. I was sitting with LBJ in the Oval Office during this conference call, and we could hear what was being said on the other end. Nixon, Humphrey, and Wallace all agreed that the President should go ahead on the basis on which he had proposed to them that he should. But--

RICHARD RUSK: Did all three of those candidates live up to those pledges?

DEAN RUSK: In general, although Nixon did leave the impression in the campaign that he had his own plan for winding up the Vietnam War.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, when you got wind of the fact that perhaps the Nixon campaign was in contact with Thieu, did you bring this to the attention of Nixon? Did you or the President have any direct discussion with Nixon on that?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I certainly did not. Whether the President did, I don't know, but I doubt it. In the middle of a political campaign you don't get into that kind of thing.

RICHARD RUSK: Because I remember the press speculation. It was common knowledge with the press at the time that South Vietnam was being encouraged to resist.

DEAN RUSK: Well, you see, Nixon rather cleverly, in his campaign of '68, left the impression that he had a plan to end the war. But he didn't tell anybody what it was.

RICHARD RUSK: When he was asked about this plan, he would kind of tap his coat pocket, as if he had something in there. He didn't want to "interfere in the negotiating process."

DEAN RUSK: Right.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, in that sense President Thieu might have elected Richard Nixon. That was a very slim margin of victory.

DEAN RUSK: Well, it was a very close business. My own hunch is that if the campaign had gone about three more days, Hubert Humphrey would have won. He was closing fast at the end, but didn't quite make it.

SCHOENBAUM: What was the feeling around LBJ or by LBJ about Humphrey? Did Humphrey at one point kind of declare his independence in October? He declared his independence of LBJ. Did you and LBJ think that that was a good thing? And what was the feeling about Humphrey's conduct of the campaign?

DEAN RUSK: It seemed clear to me that Humphrey's nomination at the Democratic convention was very heavily due to LBJ, because Humphrey went into the convention with over a thousand delegates which were, in effect, LBJ delegates. And Humphrey was able to fend off Eugene [Joseph] McCarthy and any of these others who were trying to make a bid for it. It never bothered me to see Hubert Humphrey appear to take a departure on Vietnam. After all, he was

running on his own; he was the candidate. And if he were elected it would be his administration. I think it tended to bother LBJ a little more than it did me, partly because LBJ was sensitive as to what might appear to be criticism of himself and his own policy. And after all, Hubert Humphrey had been a loyal Vice-President on this issue when he was LBJ's Vice-President. But I don't think that was really fundamental. I think LBJ was enough of a politician to know that that kind of thing can happen. LBJ never expressed any resentment to me over Hubert Humphrey's departure on that issue during the campaign. But in any event, maybe Hubert Humphrey did not depart enough, you know, to get the so called liberal wing of the Democratic party strongly in behind him in the election of '68. Many of them simply sat on their hands and elected Richard Nixon.

RICHARD RUSK: Would Hubert Humphrey have made a good President?

DEAN RUSK: I think he would, subject to his health. I forget now just when that problem developed. But I had an unusual experience with Hubert Humphrey. I went with him up to Minneapolis to speak to about twelve or fifteen thousand members of the Grange Farm Organization in Minnesota. We went up in a little Jetstar airplane from Washington. When we took off to come home, the landing wheels would not come up. And so we had to go back to Washington at one hundred miles per hour instead of five hundred miles per hour. And so I had several hours with Hubert Humphrey on that airplane. And I got a very strong impression that this great liberal Hubert Humphrey, who talked too much and was known as the great liberal, had a very practical, down-to-earth, pragmatic view about how you get things done. I mean, he fully realized, for example, that one of the problems of LBJ's great society program was how you administer it and how you pay for it. LBJ was a man in such a hurry that he was anxious to get that program onto the law books without taking time how to figure out how you would administer it, and particularly how you would pay for it. And Hubert Humphrey realized that we would all have to confront those issues as a consequence of the great society law-making program. No, I think he would have been a good President. But he was never tested. I don't know when his health began to bother him; whether that would have gotten in his way.

SCHOENBAUM: Was that during the campaign that you went up to Minnesota?

DEAN RUSK: No, that was earlier. And we had a four-hour bull session going back to Washington from Minneapolis, Minnesota. And I got to see this down-to-earth, practical side of Hubert Humphrey in a way that I had not before.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you tend to agree parenthetically with Humphrey's view of the great society?

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

SCHOENBAUM: And LBJ's attempt to get everything at once? All at once?

DEAN RUSK: I did see some figures that if we fully paid for the great society, it would at least double the federal budget. This was an extraordinary program that makes up the domestic agenda

of the United States for generations so to come. But LBJ had not really given thought to how you go about paying for all these things.

SCHOENBAUM: Plus the expense of the war.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, though I must say that it was only in the final year of the war that I remember that the war began to contribute toward any serious inflationary problem. You see, we paid for the Vietnam War within the annual increases in our gross national product. We, in effect, paid for the Vietnam War out of our fat. It was not the same situation we had in World War II. So economically, the Vietnam War was carried relatively easily as far as the financing was concerned.

RICHARD RUSK: Let us get back to that point of contention between you and the American delegation. I believe it was you and Ellsworth Bunker, and perhaps the President, on one hand, and Ambassador Harriman and Vance on the other. When Saigon objected, when Thieu dug his heels in and wouldn't go along, Harriman took the point of view that we ought to be able to make that guy go along and force him. You felt differently about it. Why couldn't we have forced Thieu to adhere to the kinds of procedures and agreements that we were in the process of working out?

DEAN RUSK: Well, if he just says "no," where do you go from there? You see, Harriman and Bunker were in two different situations there. Harriman's job was to get on with the negotiations. From his point of view it was important that the South Vietnamese turn up for these negotiations. Bunker's problem was to get Thieu to come. And so they--

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But Ellsworth Bunker in Saigon could not name a South Vietnamese delegation, put them in handcuffs, and put them on a plane and fly them to Paris. He had to get Thieu to do this. And there were times there when Thieu simply gritted his teeth and said he was not going to do it. So there was a problem there. And what I tried to do was to explain to Harriman that there was a problem in Saigon, and to explain to Bunker that there was a problem in Paris. So I was caught in the middle between these two problems.

RICHARD RUSK: We did have considerable leverage with Thieu and the South Vietnamese regime, because we underwrote a great majority of their economic aid, their finances, and--

DEAN RUSK: That's leverage, but that is not decisive. You can't put a "yes" in a man's mouth if he insists on saying "no."

SCHOENBAUM: Especially with Nixon in the wings, I suppose.

DEAN RUSK: Well, we weren't too much worried about that, except that we thought that in Thieu's mind was the idea that he would get a better deal from Nixon if he just held out.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you and Bunker and the American government really exert as much pressure as we could have under those circumstances, to try to get Thieu to go along? I gather from some of these accounts that Thieu was really being obstreperous, and he was doing it in kind of a devious way. He had shown willingness to go along, and then really raised a whole series of objections.

DEAN RUSK: Well, he was very difficult on this point. But there comes a point where the choice was just to get out and abandon Vietnam to whatever the North Vietnamese could do to it, or keep playing away trying to get Thieu to change his mind and cooperate. You know, you just can't command people in this sort of a situation. That's true of small, weak countries that are completely dependent upon you at times. These funny foreigners just won't act the way we would like them to all the time.

RICHARD RUSK: Any anecdotal examples of that phenomenon, Pop?

DEAN RUSK: Well, when I first took office under President Kennedy, I asked the Department to do a study for me on how a great power can protect itself from becoming a satellite of a small country that is completely dependent upon you. We had our own problems with that with countries like Israel, South Korea, and so forth. And the Russians had their problems with the same sort of thing here and there, specifically in North Vietnam where the Russians and Chinese were competing with each other for influence in Hanoi. And each one was nervous about forcing Hanoi into the arms of the other one. And so neither one was in a position to get complete acquiescence from Hanoi in what they would suggest to Hanoi.

SCHOENBAUM: Do you think that was the key difference between Vietnam and Korea? In Korea the Russians clearly had the upper hand, didn't they? The Chinese were there in Korea, but the Russians were controlling things behind the scenes, whereas in Vietnam the North Vietnamese could play off the Russians against the Chinese.

DEAN RUSK: I think the North Vietnamese were able to elbow some independence for themselves because of this competition between Peking and Moscow. I think that may be one of the differences with Korea. After all, the discussions which led to the termination of the Korean War began with very private talks between George [Frost] Kennan and Ambassador Iakov [Alexandrovich] Malik at the United Nations. So I think that the Russians played a key role in getting the talks at Panmunjom started in Korea.

SCHOENBAUM: But the Russians couldn't do that alone in Vietnam.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, for example, when we got no performance by Hanoi on the Laos Accords of 1962, we went to the Soviets as one of the cochairmen, along with Britain, of the Geneva conferences and pressed them very hard to use their influence in Hanoi to get compliance with the Laos Accords. But it was our impression that the Russians were unwilling to put the kind of

pressure on Hanoi that would force Hanoi wholly into the arms of Peking. And that was a limitation on the Russian ability to influence Hanoi. I mean it's my impression that as far as the Russians were concerned that they would have been glad to see Hanoi comply with the Laos Accords of 1962, because we had done a lot of the negotiations of those accords with the Russians.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you have the feeling that the Russians would have been glad also to end the Vietnam War in 1968? Were prevented by that competition?

DEAN RUSK: I rather think they thought this situation was pretty much out of their control; they really couldn't play a decisive role.

SCHOENBAUM: Is that what [Andrei Andreevich] Gromyko was telling you?

DEAN RUSK: No, not specifically. No, he wouldn't have put it in so many words.

RICHARD RUSK: What about [Anatoly F.] Dobrynin?

DEAN RUSK: No, same thing. But at Glassboro LBJ and [Aleksei Nikolaevich] Kosygin worked very carefully on a message to Hanoi which the Russians were going to send to Hanoi as a result of the Glassboro meeting. And Kosygin and LBJ did agree on the wording of a message to Hanoi. But apparently when Moscow sent that message to Hanoi it didn't make any difference in Hanoi.

RICHARD RUSK: Of course, North Vietnam had had that experience with the Geneva talks of 1954, where they were influenced and encouraged by their allies, China and the Soviet Union, to go along with those accords. Really, they screwed themselves in the process.

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think and I suspect--I mean, if I were doing a Ph.D. thesis on that point, I think I would look into the question as to whether there were some, like, say, the Russians, Chinese, maybe the French, who, in effect, said to Hanoi at that time, "Go ahead and sign the agreement. You're going to get what you want anyhow in the long run. Go ahead and sign these agreements. It's no big deal for you." And after those Geneva Accords of the mid-fifties when Ho Chi Minh saw the possibility that he was not going to get what he wanted, he might have felt betrayed. Because he might have felt that he had under-the-rug promises from various people that he would, in fact, get all of what used to be Indochina in due course.

RICHARD RUSK: I'm sure there was feeling on the part of both, certainly the Chinese and perhaps the Soviets, that they didn't necessarily like the Americans in South Vietnam with military bases and the military presence there, but they sure weren't all that happy about the idea of North and South Vietnam coming together and creating a legitimate power in Southeast Asia either. Do you remember--

DEAN RUSK: I don't think that was the view of the Maoist regime. But I think the post-Mao [Tse-tung] regime in China found that they had helped to create a dragon, because Vietnam soon got to be a problem for the Chinese. And yet they, the Chinese, had contributed a great deal to

the North Vietnamese effort, and had blocked various efforts to find a peaceful settlement either through the use of the United Nations or through the use of the Geneva machinery. So I think you would have to distinguish between the Maoist government in China and the post-Mao government in China.

RICHARD RUSK: In [Henry Alfred] Kissinger's memoirs he records a conversation where Chou En-lai had begged him and the Americans to maintain a presence in South Vietnam. That was midway through Nixon's first term I think.

DEAN RUSK: Well, that may be. I have no information on that. I do know that I think the Russians came to realize that it was important for us to have a presence in Germany and, indeed, in Berlin, that our presence in Germany was a safeguard against a revival of German irredentism and revanchism, and that our presence in Germany was a moderating influence on the Germans, as indeed it has turned out to be.

RICHARD RUSK: What do these developments suggest for the American policy in Southeast Asia? We had made a stand in Vietnam partially due to our fears of an expansionary China. And here in the early seventies we witness China and Vietnam at war with each other--At least they had some serious battles along the frontier--and a lot of antipathy between these two countries. How does that square with our original premises for making a stand in Vietnam?

DEAN RUSK: Well, the major premise for our effort in Vietnam has to be the treaty obligation that we had to "take steps to meet the common danger" if those protected by that treaty were subject to attack, and the relation between that point and the entire structure of collective security in this postwar period. I've said this on other tapes, but remember when [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy made the first decision to increase significantly our forces in South Vietnam, he had very much in mind what might have happened if [Nikita Sergeevich] Khrushchev had not believed him, President Kennedy, at the time of the Berlin Crisis of '61-'62 and the Cuban Missile Crisis. So these notions of collective security were very important to those of us of that generation who had helped to develop the idea of collective security on the basis of the experiences that produced World War II.

RICHARD RUSK: Could we have had peace in the fall of 1968? On as good of terms or even better terms as was finally negotiated by Kissinger and Nixon?

DEAN RUSK: I think you could have had peace at any time if you had got out of the way and let North Vietnam have South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, which is, in effect, what happened in '75. As a matter of fact, we could have had peace in '61 on that basis, simply by not making the effort to start with. So in retrospect we could have had peace at any time on the basis on which we finally abandoned South Vietnam in 1975 and pulled our troops out in '73.

RICHARD RUSK: Weren't we much closer to a negotiated settlement in the fall of '68 that would have meant the withdrawal of both forces? That the objections of the Saigon regime, more or less, prevented it from happening? I get the impression from reading these accounts--some of them have been written by people around Vance and Harriman--that really we had sort of a lost

opportunity for a reasonable settlement in the fall of '68. Was that the way you read the situation?

DEAN RUSK: Well, it didn't quite come off, and I forget the details. But I think the agreement we were working on in '68 would have been more favorable than the agreements that we finally got in '75.

RICHARD RUSK: We had a force of over five hundred thousand men in South Vietnam in 1968. And, it's true, that the Tet offensive did cause a deterioration of American morale and support for the war. But still we were in a lot stronger position over there in '68 than we were in 1973 when most of our men had been withdrawn.

DEAN RUSK: Well, quite frankly, I simply don't remember the details of how it was we couldn't quite pin down an agreement in the fall of '68.

RICHARD RUSK: The major stumbling block was that Saigon just wouldn't go along.

DEAN RUSK: One major stumbling block I'm quite sure was the attitude of the Saigon government. Yeah.

SCHOENBAUM: Did LBJ have hopes of doing that before he left office? Did he have--he wanted to be--

DEAN RUSK: Yes, I think he would have given his eyeteeth for a chance to wind up that affair while he was still in office. No, he wanted very much to do that if possible. But we were not able to do it.

RICHARD RUSK: Did the Congress make a mistake in 1974 and 1975 to pull the pin on our aid program?

DEAN RUSK: I was at Wake Forest University recently. And on the platform with me was Ambassador Graham Martin, who was our last ambassador to Saigon. And he made very forcefully the point that in the first year after American forces were withdrawn from South Vietnam that the South Vietnamese forces had done very well. They were getting along pretty well with the situation. But then Congress pulled the rug out from under them by cutting off American aid. And that was the thing that made the result inevitable.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you believe that?

DEAN RUSK: I'm inclined to believe that.

RICHARD RUSK: Because when they collapsed, they went like a house of cards.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, but they ran out of ammunition. They ran out of spare parts, all sorts of things. They were rationing artillery, shells, ammunition. And as soon as Congress publicly took

this action, then the morale in South Vietnam more or less collapsed. So I think the Congress does play a major responsibility for the way in which this whole thing went.

RICHARD RUSK: People in Congress responsible for that action would say that North Vietnam was going to get this country. We can buck up South Vietnam for ten or twenty years, but at terrific cost to us, terrific expense. They're going to wind up with South Vietnam.

DEAN RUSK: Well, that kind of attitude becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

RICHARD RUSK: Again, it's that question of the tenacity of the North Vietnamese, Pop.

DEAN RUSK: If Congress had continued a portion of the resources that, in fact, were captured by the North Vietnamese in South Vietnam--billions of dollars' worth of American arms, ammunition, supplies of all sorts--If the Congress had put in a portion of that in support for South Vietnam, you might have had a somewhat different story. But who knows?

SCHOENBAUM: Did Nixon make a fundamental blunder when he extended the war to Cambodia? That's something that you--

DEAN RUSK: I think he got a rather bad rap on that. The North Vietnamese and the Vietcong were using Cambodia for bases, sanctuaries. [Discussion of Rusk's semantics] Well now, we had had an under-the-rug understanding with Prince [Norodom] Sihanouk on such matters. Prince Sihanouk was unpredictable, impulsive. But I always felt that he had a deep regard for the well-being of the Cambodian people. He was overthrown when he was on a trip to Moscow and Peking to try to get their help in getting the North Vietnamese and Vietcong out of Cambodia. He would probably deny this publicly, but we had a sort of understanding with him that, for example, up in those areas of northeastern Cambodia where very few people were, that he would not object to any action we took against the Vietcong and North Vietnamese forces in that area because the chances of injuring the Cambodian people were very slight. But he was sensitive to what we might do along the border in the south where a lot of Cambodians lived, along the border with Vietnam. And he wanted us to be very careful about what we did to the Cambodian people living in that area. But somehow Nixon's--but Sihanouk always made it very clear that we must not talk publicly about what we were doing in Cambodia. The same thing was true as far as the government of Laos was concerned. We felt we had to pay attention to that because it was their country. And so we tried to respect their injunctions that we must leave them in the position of not being in complicity with us about anything that happened in those two countries. Well, Nixon--I think went only fifteen or twenty miles into Cambodia? Into that area where--

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah, the Parrot's Beak.

DEAN RUSK: There were lots of these bases and sanctuaries and so forth. And I thought that he probably got a bum rap from the press and public opinion over that issue. We did a good many things secretly in Laos, because the Laos government insisted that whatever we do we do secretly.

SCHOENBAUM: The same thing: under-the-rug--

RICHARD RUSK: We're talking about bombing in Laos, American operations--

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, and our cooperation with the tribesmen there in the mountainous areas of Laos.

RICHARD RUSK: Did we deny that we were involved with these secret activities?

DEAN RUSK: No, but we didn't talk about it. Your Uncle Jack Foisie wrote one or two pieces about this that turned out to be a little embarrassing.

RICHARD RUSK: It turned out to be embarrassing. Well, it turned out to be true probably, and he was censored, (laughter) He was told to leave South Vietnam. And his comment was--when he got back in touch with you, Pop--when you saw him I think you guys started talking about this, and you had told him that you had received a call where an American official involved in Jack Foisie's case was asked what they should do about Jack because they knew of this relationship. And he said you had told this official, "You treat him like anyone else." You told that story to Jack. And Jack said, "Dean, I knew I could count on you!" (laughter)

DEAN RUSK: As a matter of fact, that came up in Thailand.

RICHARD RUSK: That's right.

DEAN RUSK: He would have been thrown out of Thailand had my old friend, the Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman, not known that he was my brother-in-law. And so he allowed him to stay in Thailand, despite the fact that he was reporting certain stories about B-52 bases in Thailand, and things like that, for which they normally would have thrown him out of the country.

RICHARD RUSK: I asked you the question whether or not--I don't know how I phrased it, but you prefer that we didn't talk about these things. But obviously the press and other people were asking whether or not we were conducting these operations. Did we deny it?

DEAN RUSK: I forget now what I might have said to such questions, but--

RICHARD RUSK: I remember Jimmy Carter campaigning on the premise that he would never tell a lie as President.

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think you would find it very difficult to find that I lied about the subject. I would answer another question or evade it in some sort of fashion.

RICHARD RUSK: You don't ever recall lying about operations in Laos?

DEAN RUSK: No, no. No, I will repeat once more that you can search my press conferences and congressional testimony and so forth, and you would find it very difficult indeed to find anything in which I thought one thing and said another.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you authorize other people to lie on your behalf?

DEAN RUSK: (laughter) No.

RICHARD RUSK: Okay. Because this letter led to quite an issue. It came out in the Pentagon Papers.

DEAN RUSK: Coming back to Prince Sihanouk, I think it was a major setback for us when he was overthrown in Cambodia.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you ever meet him personally?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, yes, I met him at the Geneva Conference on Laos, for example.

RICHARD RUSK: What was he like?

DEAN RUSK: Well, he was intelligent, impulsive, emotional, unpredictable. But he did love Cambodia, and he had a great regard for the people of Cambodia. I think we would have all been better off if he had remained in power in Cambodia. Now he might still have been overrun by the North Vietnamese, because Ho Chi Minh was determined to get hold of everything that used to be a part of Indochina.

RICHARD RUSK: Any anecdotes involving Sihanouk?

DEAN RUSK: Well, there was one little thing. I think I probably made a mistake of tact at the Geneva Conference on Laos. Sihanouk had played quite a role in convening that Conference on Laos. And every speaker started his speech with a compliment to Prince Sihanouk, patted him on the back and so forth. For some reason I failed to do that. And I understand that Prince Sihanouk noted that and didn't like it very much. But somehow I had failed to pat him on the shoulder at the beginning of my speech. In retrospect I should have done what everybody else had done.

SCHOENBAUM: Where did you hear about his disturbed--

DEAN RUSK: Oh, it somehow leaked back to me somehow, from somebody, that he had noticed it, which was an unfortunate oversight on my part. Well, you see, Sihanouk had himself withdrawn Cambodia from the protections of the Southeast Asia Treaty. Cambodia was originally one of the so-called protocol states. And he withdrew Cambodia as a neutral country, from the protections of the Southeast Asia Treaty. And then in the 1952 Accords on Laos, Laos was withdrawn from the protections of the Southeast Asia Treaty. So that left only South Vietnam as a genuine protocol state under the Southeast Asia Treaty.

RICHARD RUSK: Isn't it a tragedy what happened to Cambodia?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, yes! One of the frightful tragedies of all time. More than a million Cambodians lost their lives through the actions of their own government that succeeded

Sihanouk. Driving people out of the cities into the countryside, trying to eek out some kind of a living, under impossible circumstances. Almost a mass slaughter of their own peoples. It was a terrible thing.

RICHARD RUSK: Does American policy bear any responsibility for what happened over there?

DEAN RUSK: I don't know the details of whether we had anything to do with the overthrow of Sihanouk. If so, it was a mistake. But I just don't know the details of that. I wasn't in government at the time.

SCHOENBAUM: I was going to bring up the defoliation of South Vietnamese to uncover the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Of course, there has been a lot of litigation in that. I guess you have been subpoenaed or testified--

DEAN RUSK: I don't recall that I've testified on that.

SCHOENBAUM: Oh, no?

DEAN RUSK: But it came up after we started the bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in 1965. And it came up to me with two central points: One was that we needed to help our airmen find their targets along the Ho Chi Minh Trail by defoliating some of these jungle roads and paths. And secondly, that the agents that were to be used had no effect on human beings or long-term effects on vegetation.

RICHARD RUSK: And so that's what you were told?

DEAN RUSK: And that was what I was told. So I went along with it. I gather, however, that when the responsibility for the operations moved to Saigon from Washington, that the defoliation effort expanded, I think far beyond anything we had in mind when we approved it at the beginning. And as for this idea that Agent Orange was damaging the human beings was something that I didn't really hear about until after I left office. But, you see, you spend a lot of manpower in clearing fields of fire around your positions. And it seemed to be a natural thing to do at the time, to clear out these paths so you could detect traffic coming down that Ho Chi Minh Trail. And you would like to have a chance to get at it with your air strikes. But it sort of went considerably beyond what we had in mind when we originally approved defoliation.

SCHOENBAUM: Control was transferred to Saigon and the Vietnamese?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. Well, I think the American forces had primary responsibility for the defoliation there.

RICHARD RUSK: Anything further with respect to these Paris Peace Talks, Pop?

DEAN RUSK: No, I think you'll find that perhaps the accounts that you will find in the *New York Times* of the period were generally pretty accurate. But I never had any real complaints about the conduct of our delegation over there: Harriman, Vance and those people. They had a

job to do. They tried to do it. They tried to find ways to move the negotiations along to a successful conclusion. And that was made much more difficult at times by the attitude of Thieu and his people in Saigon. So--

SCHOENBAUM: Was there any point in which you did think that we would have an agreement before LBJ left office? Kind of a high point of hope that you remember?

DEAN RUSK: I think Thieu eventually agreed to come, at least send a delegation. And I thought that that might open the way for a real agreement. But by that time our election had occurred. There was going to be a new administration, and it would be normal for a lot of people to start marking time until a new administration appeared in Washington. But you always hope. Diplomacy is committed to a degree of hope. There's always hope that something better, rather than something worse, can be achieved.

SCHOENBAUM: How did you spend the period after the election to January 20, 1969? What happened then in Vietnam? Was that kind of a period when--

DEAN RUSK: The same situation continued. We were trying to bring it to a conclusion during that period. Then we were caught up into the processes of the transition. LBJ told us in his administration that he wanted the transition into the Nixon administration to be as smooth as possible. He told us that he did not want major decisions to be made which ought to be made by the incoming administration. He wanted us to be as cooperative as possible with President-elect Nixon's nominees or officers in his administration. So we spent a fair amount of time on that.

RICHARD RUSK: Let me ask this one final question before we run out of tape. Pop, in retrospect, was it ever really possible, was it ever really conceivable that the North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese and we could really negotiate a peace in South Vietnam, given the nature of the struggle, a vicious civil war that killed thousands of Vietnamese?

DEAN RUSK: In retrospect, I do not believe that the North Vietnamese ever had a real incentive to negotiate a peaceful settlement of the thing.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, they never had an incentive to do so, but was it ever really possible for them to do so, given the nature of that conflict?

DEAN RUSK: Without some incentive on their part, the answer would be, "No, it was not possible," because I think that well into 1966 they thought that they could succeed by military action. But by that time we had established a military position there that they could not have knocked off.

RICHARD RUSK: Thieu, for example, in defending his conduct, in late '68 said, "We never had any illusions about the communists." Isn't the system that he represented and the system that the communists represented in North Vietnam antithetic?

DEAN RUSK: I wasn't caught up by that point of view because I had seen the Korean War brought to a conclusion. I had seen the Berlin Blockade brought to a conclusion. I had seen the

Greek guerrilla effort brought to a conclusion. So I didn't have any ideological fix against the impossibility of dealing with communists. But I think that in '67-'68 the North Vietnamese were being told, in effect, by a lot of people in this country that if they just persisted that they would get what they wanted politically. I think they made that judgment. And from their point of view, it was a correct judgment to make.

RICHARD RUSK: Could the war in Vietnam have been won?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think that if we had had a more unified homefront and a more unified Congress that we could have brought them to a negotiating table and brought the war to a more successful conclusion.

SCHOENBAUM: Was there any--

END OF SIDE 2

